



“At some stage, every outstanding person comes to Zurich,” Swiss author and Zurich resident Robert Walser once said. And indeed, Zurich seems to have a special attraction for outstanding literati. Although Zurich is by comparison a rather small metropolis, it was and still is the center, starting point, or way station for important world-famous literary figures and, above all, avant-garde movements.

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Writing and Thinking in Zurich

In Zurich, literature is cherished and nurtured. Festivals such as “**Zürich liest**” (Zurich reads) or the “**Openair Literatur Festival**” in the Old Botanical Garden offer a platform for internationally acclaimed writers and equally exciting newcomers. The **Strauhof** museum and the “**Kaufleuten Literatur**” events are also important literary hubs in Zurich. The **Sogar Theater** focuses on text and language in regular “Spoken Word” events and staged readings, while the Rote Fabrik organizes the highly popular poetry slams as part of its “Fabrik am Wörter-See” series. The “**Writers in Residence**” grants enable international authors like Teju Cole to come to Zurich for six months and be inspired by the city. And did you know that the country’s largest bookstore, **Orell Füssli**, still prints Switzerland’s banknotes? The holding company, Orell Füssli AG, dates as far back as the 16th century, to the original company, Druckerei Froschauer, which published Zwingli’s first Bible translation.

Literary Cafés

Zurich’s bars and cafés have been important for Zurich’s powers of inspiration since time immemorial. Swiss author and Zurich resident Robert Walser once said: “At some stage, every outstanding person comes to Zurich”. Walser was not the only author of international repute to fall in love with the City on the Limmat and its coffee houses. James Joyce or Thomas Mann sat for hours in the **Odeon**, while Max Frisch and Friedrich Dürrenmatt had heated discussions in the magnificent **Kronenhalle**. A short distance further on, the Dadaists founded the Dada art movement and with it their own meeting place, the **Cabaret Voltaire**. All of these places still emanate an international, intellectual, and metropolitan vibe today. Also growing in popularity are book cafés such as the following, which are veritable oases for bibliophiles, thinkers, and poets, but also for those who are simply looking for somewhere to relax and unwind:

Sphéres: Since 1999, this locale has delighted a broad, multifaceted, but above all knowledge-thirsty public. Readings and performances take place on a raised stage in the middle of the café-with-a-bookstore – or vice versa, depending on how you look at it.

Herman’s Wohnzimmer: The “living room” at the Greulich Hotel is a home-from-home in the middle of the urban “Chreis Cheib” entertainment district around Langstrasse. The cozy library lounge is the perfect place to relax and linger. A book exchange wall invites hotel guests and locals alike to swap books. Board games such as chess, Ludo, and Uno are also available at Reception.

Kosmos: The latest addition to Zurich’s cultural cosmos houses a restaurant, bar, event room, book salon, and movie theater. What perhaps sound somewhat chaotic has in fact been very agreeably and skillfully implemented. Incidentally, in the wonderful book salon, up-and-coming poets and novelists will find a corner with exquisite writing utensils from the craft shop, Fabrikat. But beware: writing can be addictive!

B2 Boutique Hotel: Meter-high bookshelves containing over 33,000 books gets bookworms' hearts racing. One of the most beautiful rooms for working, meeting friends, or simply immersing yourself into a good book.

Cabaret Voltaire: For anyone interested in Dada, the Cabaret Voltaire in the heart of Zurich is, of course, the first port of call. And in the Dada Library, fans have access to all the important Dada publications, some of which are also for sale. The range is supplemented by contemporary art and theory publications, as well as books on performance art.

Cinchona Bar, 25hours Hotel Zurich-West: Each lounge is equipped with a hand-picked selection of newspapers and magazines. And directly by the entrance, a kiosk run by Kein & Aber sells an attractive assortment of books and "must-have" everyday items.

Great Bookstores

Kunstgriff, Limmatstrasse 270, 8005 Zürich

→ kunstgriff.ch

Never Stop Reading, Spiegelgasse 18, 8001 Zürich

→ neverstopreading.com

Pile of Books, Zentralstrasse 16, 8003 Zürich

→ pileofbooks.ch

Paranoia City Buch & Wein, Ankerstrasse 12, 8004 Zürich

→ paranoiacity.ch

Print Matters, Hohlstrasse 9, 8004 Zürich

→ printmatters.ch

Sec52, Josefstrasse 52, 8005 Zürich

→ sec.52.ch

Zurich, Center of Exile Literature

Zurich's Attractiveness to the Literati

An open literary-philosophical tradition is deeply rooted in Zurich. Then and now, thinkers and writers come together in local reading societies, discussion groups, theaters, and cafés and are thus part of a lively literary landscape. The Literaturhaus, for example, is still a hub of intellectual life today; this institution belonging to the Museumgesellschaft (Museum Society) played a particularly important role during the First and Second World Wars, when it provided a refuge for many exiled literati.

The Neutral Island During the Second World War

"I always had loved this city for its beautiful position on the lake in the shadow of the mountains [...] But owing to Switzerland's peaceful setting among belligerent countries, Zurich had emerged from its

reserve and overnight had become the most important city of Europe, a meeting place of all intellectual trends”, author Stefan Zweig writes in his memoirs, published in 1942. Unlike in the surrounding European countries, in Zurich publishers could print what the readership were interested in and the theaters put on plays that were censored elsewhere and consequently deemed to be “Degenerate Art”. During this period, Zurich developed into a literary laboratory of world importance and continues to attract authors, actors, intellectuals, and philosophers to this day.

Names and Literary Works of Historical Importance

Zurich was where **James Joyce** wrote his epic work, “Ulysses”, **Robert Musil** completed “Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften” (The Man Without Qualities), and **Hugo Ball** founded Dadaism together with his partner, **Emmy Hennings**, and others in the Cabaret Voltaire. Other world-famous persons lived in Zurich and shaped the city – such as **Stefan Zweig, Elias Canetti, Alfred Döblin, Bertold Brecht, Thomas Mann and his family, Robert Musil, Kurt Tucholsky, Else Lasker-Schüler, Friedrich Glauser, and Ingeborg Bachmann**. Max Frisch, who was born and buried in Zurich, has left his mark on the city like no other writer – not least quite literally with the Letzigraben open-air swimming pool, which, as an architect, he designed. Frisch lived the longest next to Stadelhofen Train Station; one of the reasons why he liked it so much was because the **Kronenhalle** was within easy walking distance. This legendary restaurant was also the scene of an infamous row between Frisch and fellow writer **Friedrich Dürrenmatt**, who, in turn, peppered his novel, “Justiz” (The Execution of Justice) with grotesquely amusing digs at Zurich. **Gottfried Keller** and **Conrad Ferdinand Meyer** head the list of Zurich’s world-class literary figures, alongside **Johanna Spyri. Heidi**, the heroine of her children’s books of the same name, is considered to be the most famous female Swiss person in the world. The story of the book, which has sold over 50 million copies, is a Zurich creation, despite all the romanticism of its scenic setting in the Alps. Authors such as **Adolf Muschg, Martin Suter, and Hugo Lötscher** are also names that are known far beyond the Swiss borders.

Zurich’s Famous Dead

Zurich’s cemeteries are, of course, primarily places of eternal rest. However, they are also beautifully maintained parks that invite people to stroll, read, or reflect. And in some of them lie the bodies of famous authors, writers, and poets. Fans of James Joyce, for example, visit his grave at Fluntern Cemetery – and not only on 16 June, which marks Bloomsday, the day depicted in Joyce’s work, “Ulysses”. Visitors can also pay homage to Elias Canetti at the same cemetery. The Mann family (Golo, Thomas, Katia, Erika, Monika, Michael, and Elisabeth) have all found their last resting place at the cemetery in Kilchberg, as has also Conrad Ferdinand Meyer. Friedrich Glauser was buried at Manegg Cemetery, while Johanna Spyri, Gottfried Keller, and Henri Dunant are among the most famous names at Sihlfeld Cemetery.

Shooting Stars in Today's Literary Firmament

Zurich's literary future is promising: one current example is **Thomas Meyer's** novel, "Wolkenbruchs wunderliche Reise in die Arme einer Schickse" (Wolkenbruch's Wondrous Journey into the Arms of a Shiksa), the movie version of which quickly became a hit. The numerous award-winning shooting stars in Zurich's literary firmament also include:

Sibylle Berg (dramatist and author)

The socially critical author is known for her first novel, "Ein paar Leute suchen das Glück und lachen sich tot" (A Few People Search For Happiness and Laugh Themselves to Death), published in 1997. She works as a dramatist and director. For her latest book, "GRM Brainfuck", she staged a multimedia reading with actors, a rapper, and music.

Melinda Nadj Abonji (author and musician)

The Hungarian-Swiss winner of the German Book Prize and the Swiss Book Prize (both in 2010 for her novel, "Tauben fliegen auf" (Fly Away, Pigeon)), is also known as a text and solo performer, and performs as a singer and violinist.

Gion Mathias Cavelty (writer and satirist)

In the 1990s, his debut novel, "Quifezit", turned him into a literary wunderkind and enfant terrible. The former Catholic ministrant and heavy metal singer writes books, satirical columns for the "Nebelspalter" magazine, and radio plays.

Milo Rau (director and playwright)

The much discussed and internationally acclaimed author, philosopher, and theater and movie director has been artistic director of the National Theater in Ghent, Belgium since 2018. He provokes with different, often controversial themes.

Daniel Keel / Philipp Keel (Diogenes Verlag)

Diogenes is one of the most important German-language publishing houses, with authors such as Lorient, Sempé, Patrick Süskind, Donna Leon, Paulo Coelho, Patricia Highsmith, Bernhard Schlink, and Friedrich Dürrenmatt. On the death of Daniel Keel in 2011, the publishing house was taken over by his son, Philipp Keel.

Daniel Kampa (Kampa Verlag)

For 20 years, he was the right-hand man of Diogenes publisher Daniel Keel, followed by four years as publisher at Hoffmann and Campe. In 2018, Daniel Kampa founded his own publishing house, promptly snatching star author Georges Simenon from under Diogenes' nose.

Andreas Heusser (Curator), Corinna Freudiger (Head of Literature Program Kaufleuten), Gesa Schneider (Director Literaturhaus, Strauhof)

Together, they founded the Openair Literatur Festival and are very active in the promotion of literature. They are the most important event organizers in the literary scene.

Violanta by Salis and Martin Walker (Festival Director and Program Director, Zürich liest)

Thanks to them, the “Lange Nacht der kurzen Geschichten” (Long night of short stories) has developed into an annual festival, which is now one of the largest literary events in the German-speaking world.

Constantin Seibt (journalist)

The journalist and author made headlines far beyond the Swiss borders with his record-breaking crowdfunding project to found the independent newspaper, “Republic”.

Literary Events

Openair Literatur Festival Zürich

→ literaturopenair.ch

Zürich liest

→ zuerich-liest.ch

Further Information

→ **Zürich liest**

→ **Openair Literatur Festival Zürich**

→ **Strauhof**

→ **Kaufleuten Literatur**

→ **Writers in Residence**

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